

At least 85,000 child deaths in Yemen highlight Saudi-US war crimes

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A new estimate by the aid agency Save the Children that 85,000 children have died of hunger in Yemen since Saudi Arabia's US-backed bombings of the country began in 2015 underscores the criminal character of Washington's sponsorship of this horrific slaughter.

The charity said 85,000 was a conservative estimate of how many children under the age of five had starved between April 2015, when the Saudi regime began its air war, and October this year. It is difficult to get an exact number of deaths. According to aid workers, many go unreported because only half of Yemen's health facilities are functioning and many people are too poor to access the ones that remain open.

Backed by the Obama administration, Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen's civil war in 2015 to fight Shiite rebels allegedly backed by the Saudi ruling elite's regional rival, Iran. The brutal offensive has become a virtual proxy war by the US against Iran. The Pentagon has supplied aerial refuelling for Saudi bombers, naval support for a blockade of the port city of Hodeidah and intelligence assistance for selecting targets.

Save the Children said it based its figures on mortality rates for untreated cases of Severe Acute Malnutrition in infant children from data compiled by the UN. The charity warned that, based on historical studies, if acute malnutrition is left untreated, around 20–30 percent of children will die each year.

“For every child killed by bombs and bullets, dozens are starving to death—and it's entirely preventable,” Tamer Kirolos, Save the Children's country director in Yemen said. “Children who die in this way suffer immensely as their vital organ functions slow down and eventually stop.

“Their immune systems are so weak they are more prone to infections with some too frail to even cry.

Parents are having to witness their children wasting away, unable to do anything about it.”

The Red Sea port of Hodeidah, the entry point for some 80 percent of urgently needed food supplies, medicines and aid into Yemen, has been under blockade since last year. Save the Children said it had been forced to bring aid for the north of the country through the southern port of Aden, significantly slowing deliveries.

Despite supposed US-supported ceasefire offers from the Saudi monarchy, the charity also reported a “dramatic increase” in air strikes. “In the past few weeks there have been hundreds of air strikes in and around Hodeidah, endangering the lives of an estimated 150,000 children still trapped in the city.” Kirolos stated. “Save the Children is calling for an immediate end to the fighting so no more lives are lost.”

Far from ending the slaughter, the US-backed forces are taking it to an horrific new level. Earlier this month, the Saudi-led coalition reported that it had mobilised some 30,000 troops to surround Hodeidah. The troops include Emirati and Sudanese regulars, Al Qaeda militiamen and Yemeni mercenaries.

The port city is being subjected to non-stop bombardment from both the air and sea. Save the Children earlier reported that its staff counted some 100 airstrikes during one weekend, a five-fold increase compared to the first week in October.

In addition, Saudi Arabia has imposed economic sanctions and blockades on Yemen, contributing to the world's gravest humanitarian crisis. The UN warned recently that 14 million people could soon be on the brink of starvation.

The World Health Organisation recently said nearly 10,000 people, mostly civilians, had been killed in the war. Aid groups believe the death toll may be five

times higher. According to the UN, the fighting and blockades had also left 22 million people in need of humanitarian aid, and led to a cholera outbreak that has affected 1.2 million people.

In a statement on Tuesday, President Trump blatantly defended Saudi Arabia's bloody onslaught, accusing Iran of being "responsible for a bloody proxy war against Saudi Arabia in Yemen," while "Saudi Arabia would gladly withdraw from Yemen if the Iranians would agree to leave."

These comments point to the fraud of an announcement the next day by US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis that peace talks to end the war would begin next month in Sweden. Mattis could provide no dates or details. If the proposed meeting proceeds, the real purpose will be to blame Iran for the bloodbath, demand an immediate end to Iranian support for the Houthi rebels and create a pretext to continue the siege of Hodeidah.

This week, Trump reinforced Washington's partnership with the Saudi regime by touting a huge Saudi arms purchase and dismissing the evidence that the kingdom's de facto ruler, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, ordered the killing of the dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

On Wednesday, Trump lauded the Saudis, crediting the regime for a drop in oil prices. He wrote on Twitter: "Oil prices getting lower. Great! Like a big Tax Cut for America and the World. Enjoy! \$54, was just \$82. Thank you to Saudi Arabia, but let's go lower!"

Earlier, Trump brushed aside Prince Mohammed's involvement in Khashoggi's murder, writing: "[I]t could very well be that the Crown Prince had knowledge of this tragic event—maybe he did and maybe he didn't!" In line with his belligerent "America First" program, he declared that the Saudi regime, "had agreed to spend and invest \$450 billion" in the US, including \$110 billion in military equipment purchases, rather than possibly obtain arms from Russia or China.

Trump's statements are not a personal aberration. They crudely lay bare the underlying interests that American imperialism has pursued in the Middle East for decades. Washington's lucrative economic relations with the Saudi monarchy and Saudi support for US aggression in the Middle East, particularly against Syria and Iran, are part of an increasingly frenzied drive

to assert US dominance over the oil-rich and strategically-critical region.

The escalation of the siege of Hodeidah coincides with the imposition of unilateral and illegal US sanctions against Iran that are tantamount to an act of war. Whatever differences exist with the European powers over the Yemen offensive and the confrontation with Iran, Washington is intent on proceeding, regardless of the terrible human cost.

Likewise, while there may be tactical disagreements within and between the Republican and Democrat leaderships in the US over the naked character of the White House agenda, both capitalist parties and the entire political, military and intelligence establishment regard Saudi Arabia as a bastion of reaction against the working class across the Middle East, and a key ally in the conflict with Iran, Russia and China.



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